THE

SECRET OF LA SALETTE

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Little Apocalypse of Our Lady

by

Solange Hertz

"Well, now, my children, you will pass this along to all my people."

With these words Mary the Mother of God concluded the famous message she came to earth on September 19, 1846 to deliver to two poor peasant children employed as cowherds on the mountain of La Salette. Famous as the message is, its full contents continue unknown to the vast majority, not only in the world, but even in the Church. This leads one to wonder who "all Mary's people" really are, for only these, it would seem, does it succeed in reaching, as our Lady said it would.

She didn't ask the children, Melanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud, to pass it along. She simply told them they would, and that was that. And they have. Somehow, in every generation since, little souls are found who transmit our Lady's words faithfully and quietly, although for the most part painfully, by the most humble, nay, bumbling means. Please God this may be one of them.

Outside the Gospel itself, hardly any communication from heaven has encountered such furious and determined opposition, and that not so much outside the Church, as from within, from those members who would be most expected to take the Secret to heart and preach it from the housetops. It has continued unabated, despite the fact that the apparition at La Salette enjoyed almost immediately the full approbation of the Church, with rich indulgences granted to pilgrims there, and that canonically approved miracles have taken place on the spot. Why?

"Alas," wrote Melanie to her director Abbé Combe in 1903, "the bishops, those who considered themselves referred to in the Secret, are the enemies of this merciful Secret, just as the high priests condemned the divine Savior to death! . . . And inasmuch as the Mother of God and of all Christians by adoption at the foot of the Cross has recommended that her message in its entirety be made known to her people, what are we waiting for to obey the Virgin Mother, seeing that every day we behold the punishments announced by the Secret taking place?

"What more are we waiting for, inasmuch as Holy Church has shown herself in favor insofar as She can where revelations are concerned? Pius IX ordered the Bishop of Grenoble

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to build a beautiful Church on the mountain of La Salette. Leo XIII crowned the statue and gave the sanctuary the title of Basilica. What more do we need to beat our breasts, to admit that all, all of us, have sinned, all of us have provoked God's justice, all of us have set our lips to the poisoned fount of our depraved passions, drunkenness from which plunges us into darkness? Whoever is ill-willed in regulating his life according to the law of God, according to the maxims of the Gospel, will always find reasons for doubting everything he wants to be in doubt about; the faith of these people is not a sanctifying faith. . ." (Documents Pour Servir à l'Histoire Réelle de La Salette, Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris, 1963-66)

In our days the Secret has been largely consigned to oblivion. In the lifetime of the visionaries some confessors refused absolution to penitents who read it. Melanie and Maximin were subjected to unparalleled and totally unfounded calumny and persecution. Melanie's own Bishop, along with many other persons, made her out as insane, or at best unstable. Maximin was reputed an alcoholic. To this day, at best, the general judgment would agree with that expressed by Fr. John Kennedy in his Light on the Mountain: "The deficiencies and idiosyncrasies of Maximin and Melanie are but gargoyles on the monumental, enduring fact of La Salette." La Salette, yes; Maximin, Melanie and the Secret, no.

After receiving the first communication from our Lady dealing with the divine displeasure at profanations of Sunday and the Holy Name -- generally propagated as the Message of La Salette and beyond the limits of this paper -- both children were entrusted with a secret. Maximin's, apparently never intended for the public, was carried to the grave with him. Melanie's, however, was meant to be revealed in due time; and the moment she began doing so in obedience to heaven, she attracted the full brunt of hell's fury.

Many good people when they heard it were convinced that Melanie had made it up, so sure were they our Lady would never say such terrible things about the clergy. And if it's true, what good does it do to reveal it?

To which Melanie replied: "No, no, the Seat of Wisdom never spoke ill of the Ministers of the Altar! Mercifully, Mary, Patroness of France, Queen of the Catholic clergy, pointed out the diseases infecting the souls of the pastors of God's people. Those who have forgotten prayer and penance and filled their hearts with affection for transitory things, their faith has cooled. . . Instead of rebelling, they should have entered into themselves, revived their faith, their charity, wisely regulating their conduct in accordance with the examples of Jesus, our divine Master and model." (Letter to Fr. Combe, September 1902)

That Pius IX had believed in Melanie absolutely, indeed countering her detractors with, "Melanie is a good girl," seemed to weigh little in her favor. Nor did the fact that he later relieved her of her religious vows, which would have kept her in the cloister where the enemies of the Secret wanted her kept, even going so far as trying to do so forcibly. She tells us, "His holiness Pius IX relieved me of such vows as could not be kept in the world: he said that I couldn't accomplish my mission in the cloister and he granted me privileges I would never have dared ask him."

Badgered beyond endurance, even excommunicated by one French bishop, Melanie eventually fled incognito to Italy, to publish the Secret there under the protection of friendly Italian prelates. Pope Leo XIII, who approved of Melanie as heartily as his predecessor, called her to Rome in 1879 to confer with her not only about the Secret, but about a rule for a religious order which our Lady had given her at the same time and wished founded immediately against the coming crisis. Specifically the Order of the Mother of God, the "Apostles of the Latter Times" predicted by St. Louis de Montfort, it was encouraged in every way by the Pope, who in fact kept Melanie in Rome six months finalizing its Constitutions, but despite several abortive attempts, it always failed to materialize. (The present religious organized under the name of La Salette do not follow this rule, nor are they in any way connected with it.) This great work is yet to come.

The ire of the French bishops, whom Melanie knew to be masonically controlled, pursued her even into Italy, where she was driven from pillar to post in her attempts to remain hidden from the world. Applying heavy pressure on Rome to have the Secret put on the Index, these high ecclesiastics even threatened to withhold Peter's Pence from the impoverished Apostolic treasury. This was never done, but to placate them Cardinal Caterini sent a letter from the Inquisition forbidding Melanie in 1880 to write about or publish anything further on the Secret.

"This unhappy letter has finished, you might say, poisoning my existence," said poor Melanie," and has evaporated my trembling hope that by Christianity's return to its God the long and great scourges which our prevarications deserve might be much mitigated." In great anguish she complied with the letter. "As for me, I want to be submissive to the Holy Church of God." Nevertheless she conceded that if she could be certain "that the Caterini letter was unknown to the Holy Father, then I would be free to write and would write." (Letter to A. M. Schmid, of the periodical Légitimité, July 25, 1896).

Apparently never accorded this certainty, she continued obedient. Contrary to her detractors, Melanie's life was one of high virtue, austerity and prayer, her apparent eccentricities and "instability" due almost entirely to her fidelity to her mission and her determination to keep herself and her many extraordinary gifts (among them the stigmata) hidden from public view. On reading an account of her life in 1910, Pope St. Pius X exclaimed to the Bishop of Altamura, in whose diocese she had died and was buried, "La nostra Santa!" He suggested to the Bishop that her cause for beatification be introduced immediately.

Testimony to her holiness is plentiful if one knows where to look, but that of the aged Fr. Rigaux, her last director, should suffice: "In the 48 years that I've been a priest, I've known and directed some very beautiful souls. I dare state before God, who will soon judge me, that never have I encountered a soul so humble, gentle, pure, obedient, a virgin so pure, a character so strong, a victim so resigned in frightful trials, a martyr in body, bearing the stigmata from her tenderest years."

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Melanie died at the age of 72, alone and unattended, on December 14, 1904, but she left us the Secret. It's extraordinary how many people today are still hesitant about reading it, let alone believing it, because they think it was on the Index. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although it's true that several publications dealing with it were condemned -- some of them with very good reason -- the Secret itself has never suffered any official condemnation. As a matter of fact there is extant a letter from Fr. Lepidi, Master of the Sacred Palace, dated December 16, 1912 to Cardinal Luçon stating officially that the Secret of La Salette has never been condemned by the Index nor by the Holy Office.

Delivered orally hundreds of times by Melanie herself, it was first published in 1873 under the Imprimatur of the Bishop of Naples. It appeared a second time under the Imprimatur of Salvatore Zola, Bishop of Lecce, Italy, who gave his permission after consulting with Leo XIII on the matter. This edition was reprinted ne varietur in France in 1904, a few months before Melanie died.

In the meantime the full text had been examined by the Congregation of the Index, which found no changes necessary. When Leo XIII read it initially, not only did he voice no objection, but he ordered a version with fuller explanations to be undertaken! The Bishops of Arras and Bayonne granted further Imprimaturs in 1893, followed by many others throughout Christendom. Fr. Rigaux, writing around the turn of the century, stated that he had in his possession "28 editions of the Secret, with Imprimatur from Cardinals and Bishops."

Nevertheless, as Melanie wrote then, "With Imprimatur and all the Imprimaturs, I wonder who will believe the teachings of an apparition, when almost the whole Church of God no longer believes in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or if she does believe, it's only with the faith of the intellect and not with the faith of the will." (May 19, 1904) Although never placed on the Index, the Secret suffered grievous impediments due to the cause Melanie saw so well. It must be forcibly noted here that by a decree of the Holy Office dated December 21, 1915, all the faithful are forbidden to write commentaries or interpretations of the Secret. As far as can be ascertained, this decree is still in effect and must be obeyed.

But are commentaries really necessary? As Melanie told her director in 1903, "souls who are God's friends can guess the Secret's meaning without help, and the others won't want to because it applies to them too closely." When all is said and done, "The Secret only proposes observance of God's law, and complains of the lack of observance of this same law, and it threatens the transgressors of this holy law with chastisements and scourges." Pope Pius IX summed it up even more briefly: "If you don't do penance you will perish!"

If this was clear at the turn of the century, it's even clearer now for those with eyes to see. Hardly any soul of good will needs help interpreting the Secret of La Salette today. It has become an open secret if ever there was one. In the same letter to her director just quoted Melanie explained to him exactly the sort of thing our Lady was referring to when she said, "In 1865 the abomination will be seen in the holy places:"

"There are two holy places: the Church and the spouse, or if you prefer, the soul which no longer belongs to herself. In 1865 there passed like a gust of rebellion: an archbishop who poisoned a king; cardinals and others sold the great See of Catholicism, after having become fathers several times, and events of like nature, it's a long story. But nobody knows about it you say? Haven't we heard tell that Napoleon, Garibaldi, Gambetta and certain priests were in the habit of visiting convents from time to time, that they were very charitable towards these nuns? and that in other countries or kingdoms the rendezvous took place in churches? And hasn't Freemasonry been solemnly established, that is to say, recognized? But it's useless, I'm not capable of uncovering the stratagems, the brood of crimes which only apathy and frenzy for pleasure have hidden from the eyes of those who already no longer see. We shall see: it's not everyone who will see, but those souls nearest to the spotless light!" She concludes, "At most we can say that God is reproaching us with the same crimes which caused the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to perish by fire from heaven."

The prohibition against her publishing anything about the Secret must have weighed on her ever more heavily as she saw public morality sink lower and lower, for apparently she had been given to understand very much more than our Lady's words conveyed on the surface. Speaking of the apparition she says, "Each word develops and the future action takes place within the moment, and thousands and thousands more things are seen than the ears hear. . . One sees plots hatching, one sees the kings of the earth, each of whom has several guardian angels; one sees them moving about, doing, undoing; one sees the jealousy of some, the ambition of others, etc., and all that in one word escaping from the lips of her who makes hell tremble." (Letter to Fr. Bliard)

In 1897 she mourned to Fr. Combe, "God used to speak continually to His prophets and they weren't held to obedience to . . . when this was contrary to God's will. Today, one must obey or be struck with excommunication. I can only groan at the lamentable state of our loving Jesus' representatives . . ."

Yet, even given permission, Melanie would have been powerless to transmit it all. To the pious and zealous Fr. Roubaud -- who had hoped in the beginning to publish a volume on the subject from her pen -- she said, "I don't feel I have the grace to explain. The

world isn't disposed to hear it. What's more, the little people of God don't need to touch with the finger. Our sweet Mother Mary didn't come for believers, but for those who don't practice the promises made at their baptism." She had prefaced this with the rueful comment, "It's possible, and it's even certain, that the Jews will re-assume their title of people of God, and perhaps we shall be rejected."

Melanie was not acquainted with the famous prophecy of St. Malachy, but in 1894 she told this good priest that among the future events she saw unrolling in the course of the apparition, "I didn't see, I don't see, any Great Pope or Great Monarch before an extremely great tribulation, horrifying, terrible and general for all Christendom. But before that time, twice there will be a short-lived peace; two shaky, servile, doubtful popes."

Anyone who thinks the crisis in the Church we suffer today began with the Second Vatican Council need only read Melanie's correspondence. The following extracts from her letters to Fr. Roubaud are a fair sample:

"When the Secret has been scorned, misunderstood . . . held back for money, one must be surprised at nothing. The Church will endure forever, our Lord said so; but among the teaching members of the Church, *what traitors, what apostates, what mercenaries, what sectarians, who bear the imprint or the sign of the beast with ten horns St. John speaks of in his vision on Patmos! But this beast similar to the Lamb, who rises out of the earth, isn't it the figure of faithless ecclesiastics? I firmly believe so. Happy those who die in God's grace, for those who live will see sad and terrifying things. We still haven't reached the beginning of the end." (January 2, 1892)

Later the same year, her words appropos of a good priest who was losing his eyesight have sadly increased in relevance today: "Oh, how God afflicts His true servants in these times! But this affliction is a punishment for the half-Christians who have rendered themselves unworthy of hearing the word of truth, which they obstinately refuse to put into practice. When God favored us, when He was giving us all we needed, we abandoned Him; now we blaspheme Him like the damned. God was giving us His graces in manifold ways, now He deprives us of everything, He plays deaf, indifferent, as we did towards Him. We have nothing to say. And now He is taking from us the few good priests who,despite all the thunderbolts of those sold for gold, never ceased teaching us the practice of the Christian virtues and flight from sin. . .

". . . You'd think the devil would keep quiet inasmuch as men are almost all working for him, for his triumph. Well, no, he turns himself into an angel of light, aping true apparitions, truly divine. Later he'll show his horns, in order to destroy the true divine apparitions by his impostures. It's noteworthy that in all these false apparitions there are always many flattering words directed to certain persons, which these seers, seeing only the devil, apply to some gullible person wrapt in refined self-love. It's also true there are visionaries without visions, who don't even need the devil's help, being themselves possessed."

The rash of false signs and wonders, tongues and prophecies soliciting our attention so generally now was evidently well under way in the last century. On September 9, 1894, she writes, "The devil is a liar, what he says mustn't be believed because if he says something true, it's preceded and followed by lies and wrapped in obscurity. The good Lord doesn't permit His true worshippers to be playthings of evil spirits at their expense. Today already in the world, in families (Christian in appearance) there are supernatural-diabolic things: these are treated as illness, and bit by bit the serpent's wonders insinuate themselves noiselessly into society -- Mistrust of self, deep and true humility, supreme love of God alone can deliver these souls from the eternal abysses. It seems to me, if I'm not mistaken, that we don't have to wait for the reign of the Antichrist to see apostates behind masks; today we have a great number, whom Satan recog-

* Here and elsewhere in quotations from Melanie, italics are hers, not ours.

nizes as his own. The sentinels of the sanctuary have passed into the enemy camp!!! The divine supernatural has been scorned! We'll be taken in the nets of the diabolic supernatural."

Sad to say, that Melanie prophesied truly here can now be demonstrated. All the more reason, therefore, to heed the Secret. Why risk setting our sights to doubtful prophecies from lesser sources? The words of the greatest saints can never measure up to those of the Mother of God, whose motherly apocalypse could rank second only to that of our Lord himself spoken in the Gospels and through St. John on Patmos.

With this thought in mind we can proceed to a first hand reading of the authentic Secret. The accompanying text is that of the definitive 1904 edition, of which Melanie said in April of that year to Fr. Rigaux: "The Secret is word for word that of our gentle Mother, just as I gave it to His Holiness Leo XIII in 1879." The following October she wrote, "I protest highly against a differing text, which people may dare publish after my death. I protest once more against the very false statements of all those who dare say and write: First, that I embroidered the Secret; second, against those who state that the Queen of Wisdom did not say to transmit the Secret to all her people."

We might note here that the Secret was given to Melanie in French. Although she spoke only patois at the time and learned French later, she was able to understand the message, and retained it perfectly word for word. When a gentleman asked her as a child how such a thing was possible, she answered simply, "I don't know. If the holy Virgin so willed it, sir, I understood." Our translation may be rather stiff in spots, but every effort was made to hew as closely as possible to the original, inasmuch as in a communication of this kind a change in the nuance of one word can shift the interpretation.

The Secret must be allowed to speak for itself, coming to us as it does from our Lady herself. A true apocalypse, it must be read like all apocalyptic literature, which uses enigma and metaphor precisely so that only those for whom it is intended may grasp its true meaning. Let him who reads understand. Our Lady's own people, by supernatural instinct, will know not to take its terms in their purely literal sense, any more than they would in reading the Apocalypse of St. John. For instance, they would know better than to take in a carnal sense the "Hebrew nun," the "false virgin" who is to bear the Antichrist as a result of relations with a Bishop. Genuine apocalyptic messages deal primarily in spiritual matters. These are clothed in material imagery designed to give the clue to the meaning, but which remains secondary. Nor is there any strict chronology; sometimes the same event is described in different ways.

Even so, only the light of the Holy Ghost, supported by prayer, penance and innocence of life can unlock divine mysteries for the human intellect, which no amount of purely human explanation can enlighten in such matters. This makes obeying the Decree of 1915 rather easy, for as Melanie said, commentaries are largely useless anyway.

Who will not heed Melanie may heed St. Gregory the Great: " . . . Unless the same Spirit is in the heart of the one who learns, unprofitable is the word of the teacher. . . Unless He is within who will teach us, the tongue of the teacher labors in vain. All alike hear the voice of the speaker, yet all do not understand alike the meaning of the words they hear. Since the word is the same, why do your hearts not understand alike, if not for the reason that, although the voice of the speaker is directed towards all, it is the Master within us who teaches us what is said, and some more than others?" (Sermo 30 In Evangelia)

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We can do no better than to introduce the Secret with the same words Melanie used before setting down her recital of the marvelous happening at La Salette:

"I obey the most holy Virgin Mother of God and Mother of all believers. I submit this publication to the judgment of the Holy Apostolic See, and I declare condemned in advance all found therein contrary to Catholic doctrine:"

THE SECRET OF LA SALETTE
(Authentic text of 1904)

Melanie, what I am going to tell you now will not always be secret; you can publish it in 1858.

Priests, my Son's ministers, priests, by their evil life, by their irreverences and their impiety in celebrating the holy mysteries, by love of money, love of honor and pleasures, priests have become sewers of impurity. Yes, priests call forth vengeance, and vengeance is suspended over their heads. Woe to priests, and to persons consecrated to God, who by their infidelities and their evil life are crucifying my Son anew! The sins of persons consecrated to God cry to heaven and call for vengeance, and now here is vengeance at their very doors, for no longer is anyone found to beg mercy and pardon for the people; there are no more generous souls, there is now no one worthy of offering the spotless Victim to the Eternal on the world's behalf.

God will strike in an unparalleled manner.

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! God will exhaust His anger, and no one will be able to escape so many evils all at once.

The heads, the leaders of the people of God, have neglected prayer and penance, and the devil has darkened their minds; they have become those wandering stars which the ancient devil will drag with his tail to destruction. God will permit the ancient serpent to sow divisions among rulers, in all societies and in all families; both physical and moral punishments will be suffered. God will abandon men to themselves and will send chastisements one after the other for over 35 years.

Society is on the eve of most terrible scourges and greatest events; one must expect to be governed by a rod of iron and to drink the chalice of God's wrath.

Let not my Son's Vicar, the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX leave Rome after the year 1859; but let him be steadfast and generous, let him do battle with the weapons of faith and love; I shall be with him.

Let him beware of Napoleon; his heart is double, and when he will want to be both Pope and emperor at the same time, God will soon withdraw from him: he is that eagle who, desiring always to rise, will fall on the sword he wanted to use to force the peoples to exalt him.

Italy will be punished for its ambition in wanting to shake off the yoke of the Lord of lords; thus she will be handed over to war; blood will flow on all sides; Churches will be closed or desecrated; priests, religious will be driven out; they will be put to death, and to a cruel death. Many will abandon the faith, and the number of priests and religious who will separate themselves from the true religion will be great; even Bishops will be found among these persons.

Let the Pope beware of miracle workers, for the time has come for the most astonishing wonders to take place on the earth and in the air.

In the year 1864 Lucifer, together with a great number of devils, will be loosed from hell: little by little they will abolish the faith, and that even in persons consecrated to God; they will so blind them, that without a special grace, these persons will take on the

spirit of these evil angels; a number of religious houses will lose the faith entirely and cause many souls to be damned.

Bad books will abound over the earth, and the spirits of darkness will everywhere spread universal relaxation in everything concerning God's service: they will have very great power over nature; there will be churches to serve these spirits. People will be transported from one place to another by these evil spirits, and even priests, because they will not have lived by the good spirit of the Gospel, which is a spirit of humility, charity and zeal for the glory of God. The dead and the just will be made to rise. [That is to say, these dead will assume the aspect of righteous souls who once lived on earth, in order to seduce men more easily; these so-called resurrected dead, who will be nothing other than the devil under these faces, will preach another Gospel, contrary to that of the true Christ Jesus, denying the existence of heaven, if these be not in fact the souls of the damned. All these souls will appear joined to their bodies.] * There will be extraordinary wonders every place because the true faith has been extinguished and false light illumines the world. Woe to the Princes of the Church who will be occupied only with piling up riches upon riches, with guarding their authority and lording with pride!

My Son's Vicar will have much to suffer, because for a time the Church will be handed over to great persecutions: it will be the time of darkness; the Church will undergo a frightful crisis.

With God's holy faith forgotten, each individual will want to direct himself and rise above his peers. Civil and ecclesiastical authority will be abolished, all order and justice will be trampled underfoot. Only murders, hatred, jealousy, lying and discord will be seen, with no love of country or family.

The Holy Father will suffer greatly. I shall be with him till the end to receive his sacrifice.

The wicked will make a number of attempts on his life without being able to shorten his days (nuire à ses jours); but neither he nor his successor will see the triumph of God's Church.

Civil governments will all have the same objective, which will be to abolish and make every religious principle disappear, to make way for materialism, atheism, spiritism and vices of all kinds.

In the year 1865, the abomination will be seen in the holy places; in the convents the flowers of the Church will putrefy, and the devil will establish himself as king of all hearts. Let those who are at the head of religious communities be on their guard concerning the persons they are to receive, because the devil will use all his malice to introduce into religious orders persons given to sin, for disorders and love of carnal pleasures will be widespread over the whole earth.

France, Italy, Spain and England will be at war; blood will flow in the streets; Frenchman will fight with Frenchman, Italian with Italian; then there will be a general war which will be appalling. For some time God will no longer remember France or Italy, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is no longer known. The wicked will unleash all their malice; even in homes there will be killing and mutual massacres.

With the first lightning blow of His sword, the mountains and all nature will tremble with dread, because the disorders and crimes of men are piercing the vault of the heavens. Paris will be burned and Marseille swallowed up; a number of large cities will be shattered and swallowed by earthquakes; all will seem lost; only murders will be seen, the clash of arms and blasphemies heard. The righteous will suffer greatly; their prayers, their penance and their tears will rise to heaven and all God's people will ask pardon and mercy and will

*Added by Melanie.